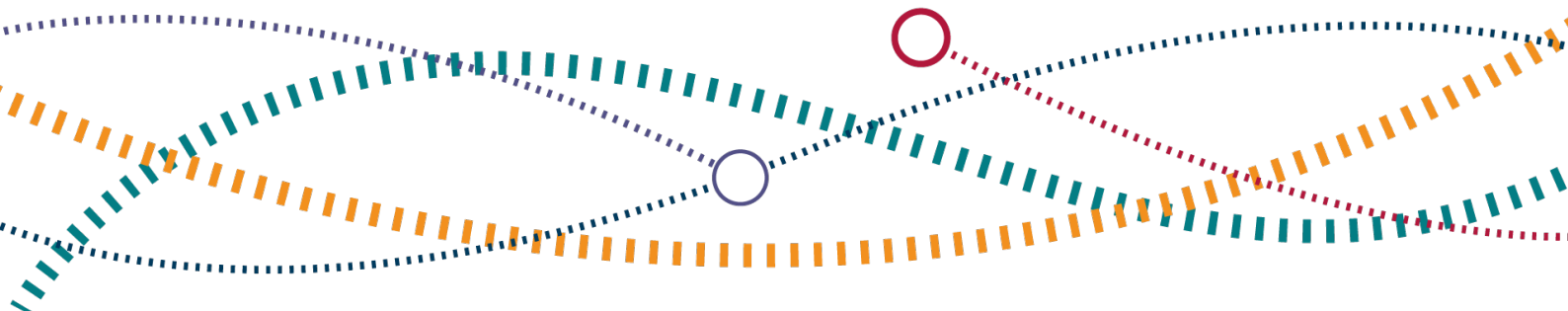




Annual Assessment of National Highways' Performance

2021 Safety Update

17 November 2021



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Introduction

The Office of Rail and Road independently monitors National Highways' (Previously Highways England) management of the strategic road network – the main A-roads and motorways in England. We hold the company to account for delivering safety improvements as set out in the company's Licence and the road investment strategy.

This is an update to our annual assessment of the company's performance in 2020-2021, published in July 2021 following the release of new safety data covering 2020 by the Department for Transport (DfT).

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and associated national lockdowns in 2020 reduced traffic levels on National Highways' network by a quarter, compared to 2019 levels. These lower traffic levels resulted in a large reduction in the number of people killed or seriously injured on the network in 2020. Therefore, drawing firm conclusions from 2020 data should be approached with caution.

Safety

The latest adjusted road casualty statistics published by the Department for Transport show that 1,397 people were killed or seriously injured on the English strategic road network (SRN) in 2020.

1. In the first road period (RP1), National Highways' safety key performance indicator had a target to reduce the number of people killed or seriously injured (KSIs) on the SRN by 40% in 2020, compared to a baseline of the 2005 to 2009 average.
2. Although the second road period (RP2) began in April 2020, National Highways' performance against its safety target for RP1 ended in December 2020.
3. In our [annual assessment of National Highways' performance](#), published in July 2021, we concluded that Highways England was likely to achieve its safety target for 2020. Lower traffic levels on the network due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic were expected to make the target easier to meet.
4. On 30 September 2021, DfT published its [road casualty statistics](#) for 2020.
5. The latest adjusted figures show that 1,397 people were killed or seriously injured on the SRN in 2020. This is 663 (32.2%) fewer than in 2019 and represents a 53.7% reduction from the baseline. In comparison, deaths and serious injuries on all roads in England fell by 19.9% since 2019, and by 41.8% compared to the same 2005 to 2009 baseline period.
6. In 2020 there were 138 deaths on the SRN, 72 (34%) fewer than in 2019. This is the lowest recorded figure for the SRN.

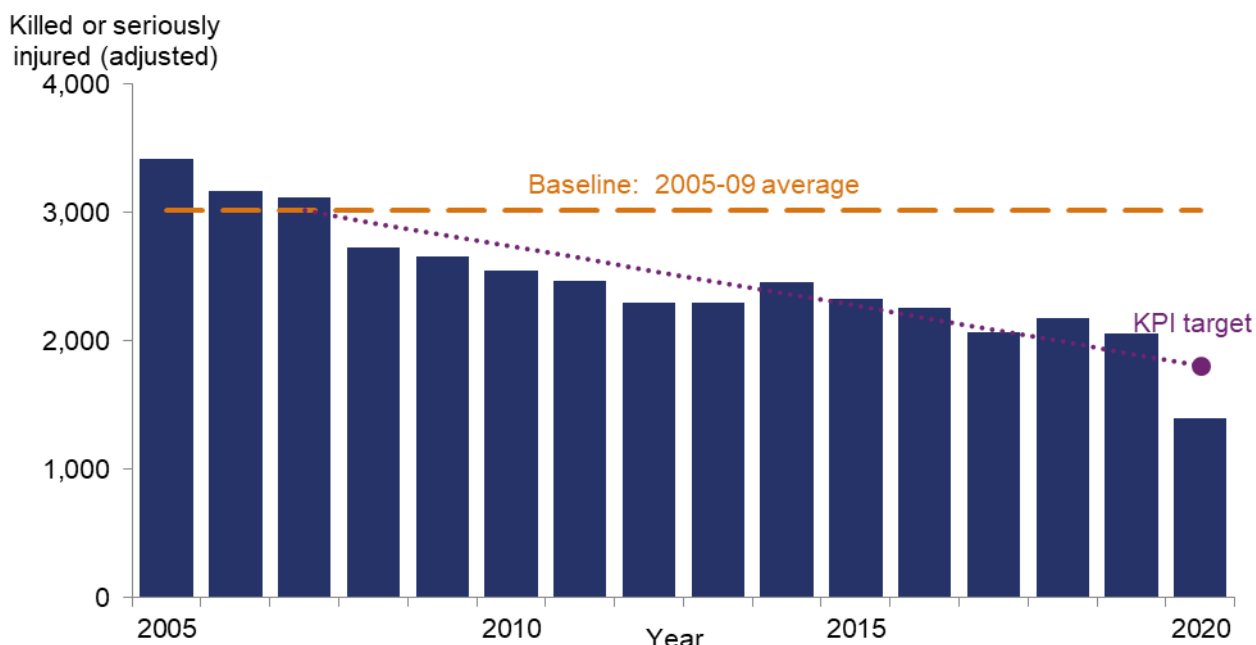
Severity adjustment

Since 2012, a large number of police forces moved to injury-based reporting systems. The system affects the number of serious and slight injuries reported. In previous years, serious injuries may have been classified as slight injuries.

The Department for Transport publishes adjusted figures, these are the estimated number of serious and slight injuries if all police forces used injury-based severity reporting. This enables the figures to be compared with historical data.

Figure 1.1 Killed or seriously injured (adjusted), English strategic road network, 2005 to 2020

National Highways have met their 2020 safety target
Killed or seriously injured (adjusted), English strategic road network, 2005-20



Source: [DfT road casualty statistics \(RAS30081\)](#)

- National Highways has achieved more than a 40% reduction in people killed or seriously injured in 2020 compared to the 2005 to 2009 baseline.

Table 1.1 Killed or seriously injured (adjusted), English strategic road network, 2020, 2019 and 2005 to 2009

Casualty Severity	2020	2019	2005-09 baseline	Percentage change from	
				2019	Baseline
Killed	138	210	357	-34%	-61%
Seriously injured (adjusted)	1,259	1,850	2,768	-32%	-55%
Killed or seriously injured	1,397	2,060	3,017	-32%	-54%

Source: [DfT road casualty statistics \(RAS30081\)](#)

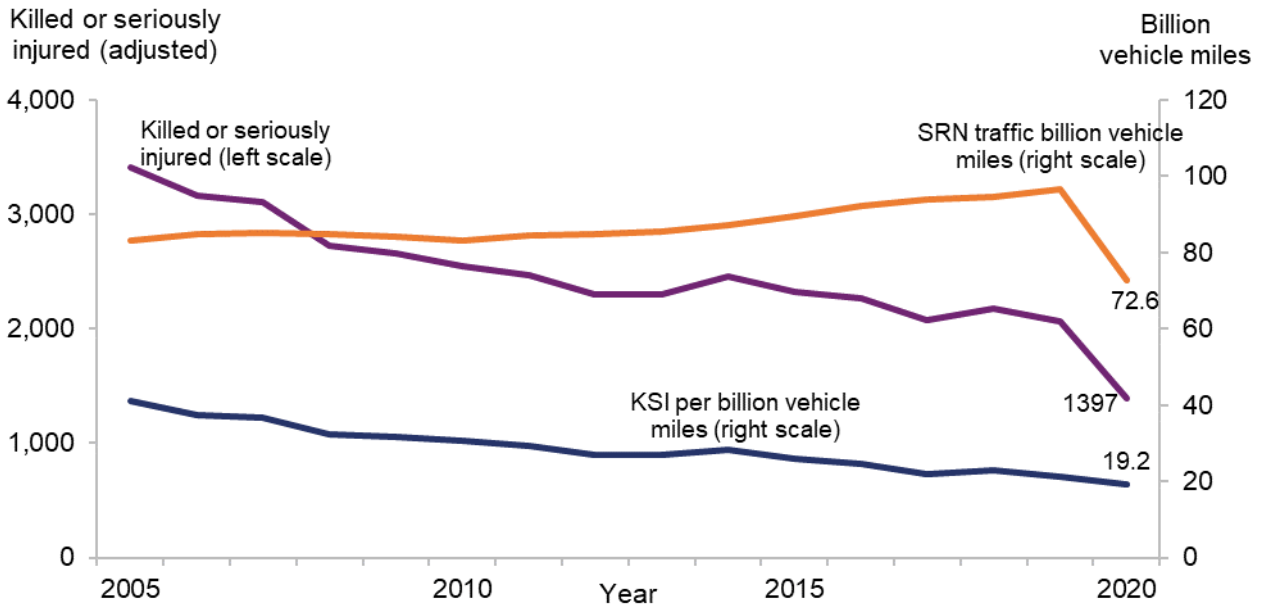
Casualty Rates

To better understand the impact of reduced traffic, it is useful to look at casualty rates, the number of casualties per billion miles travelled.

- Figure 1.2 shows that whilst the total number of KSI's fell in 2020, along with traffic levels on the SRN, the rate of people killed or seriously injured also fell. This shows that road users were less likely to be killed or seriously injured accounting for the fall in traffic.

Figure 1.2 Killed or seriously injured (adjusted) per billion vehicle miles, English strategic road network, 2005 to 2020

In 2020 the rate of KSIs fell on National Highways' network
 Killed or seriously injured (adjusted) per billion vehicle miles, English strategic road network, 2005-20



Source: DfT [road casualty statistics \(RAS30081\)](#) and DfT [traffic statistics \(TRA4101\)](#)

- DfT reported that for all roads in Great Britain, the rate of fatalities per billion vehicle miles travelled increased by 5% in 2020 compared to 2019. This increase in the fatality rate was not observed on the SRN, where a fall of 12% was observed, from 2.2 people killed per billion vehicle miles to 1.9 people killed per billion vehicle miles in 2020.

Conclusion

11. National Highways has met its RP1 target to reduce the number of people killed or seriously injured on the SRN by 40% compared to 2005 to 2009 levels. There was a reduction in the rate of casualties on the SRN. However, with much less traffic on the SRN due to the coronavirus pandemic in 2020, it is difficult to draw firm conclusions from the data.

“National Highways has met its RP1 target to reduce the number of people killed or seriously injured on the SRN...”

12. National Highways must continue to work hard to reduce the number of people killed or seriously injured on its network. The company should focus on its target to deliver a 50% reduction in people killed or seriously injured on the SRN by the end of RP2 compared to 2005 to 2009, and on its longer-term goal of zero harm on the network by 2040.
13. As set out in our annual assessment in July 2021, we believe that National Highways demonstrates a strong commitment to improving safety on the SRN. The company delivered an extensive programme of actions aimed at improving safety in RP1, and we will continue to scrutinise, and report on, the actions it takes to improve safety in RP2 and beyond.
14. Traffic levels are expected to have increased in 2021 compared to 2020 and we expect the number of people killed or seriously injured on the network to also increase as more vehicles and road users travel on the network.



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